WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

FACT SHEET

What is mental health?

- Good mental health is a sense of well-being, confidence and self-esteem. It enables us to fully enjoy and appreciate other people, day-to-day life and our environment. When we are mentally healthy we can:
  - form positive relationships
  - use our abilities to reach our potential
  - deal with life's challenges.

How can we improve our mental health?

- A few tips for positive mental health are:
  - talk about or express your feelings
  - exercise regularly
  - eat healthy meals
  - relax and enjoy your hobbies
  - set realistic goals
  - get enough sleep
  - spend time with friends and loved ones
  - develop new skills
  - talk to your GP or a health professional.
- For professional help, find local services at www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth

What is mental illness?

- One in five Australians will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their lives. A mental illness is a health problem that significantly affects how a person thinks, behaves and interacts with other people.
- It is diagnosed according to standardised criteria.
- A mental health problem also affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves, but to a lesser extent than a mental illness.
- Mental illnesses are of different types and degrees of severity. Some of the major types are:
  - anxiety
  - schizophrenia
  - bipolar mood disorder
  - personality disorders
  - eating disorders
  - depression.
- These illnesses may also be referred to as a mental disorder, mental impairment or psychiatric disability.

What causes mental illness?

- Mental illness results from complex interactions between the mind, body and environment. Factors which can contribute to mental illness are:
  - long-term and acute stress
  - biological factors such as genetics, chemistry and hormones
  - use of alcohol, drugs and other substances
  - cognitive patterns such as constant negative thoughts and low self esteem
  - social factors such as isolation, financial problems, family breakdown, violence
- These factors can be minimised by a strong and supportive community environment.

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Useful links

- **Australian Government Mental Health and Well Being** website has a number of fact sheets available on:
- What is:
  - Mental illness
  - Anxiety disorder
  - Bipolar mood disorder
  - Depressive disorder
  - Eating disorder
  - Personality disorder
  - Schizophrenia

  Most of these fact sheets are available in 21 languages from Multicultural Mental Health Australia.

- **Auseinet** is the Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health. They have information and resources on mental health and illness.
  Website: www.auseinet.com
- **Better Health Channel** is a Victorian Government website with information on health and mental illness translated resources.
  Website: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- **beyondblue** provides information and resources on stress, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and postnatal depression.
  Website: www.beyondblue.org.au
- **Black Dog Institute** is an educational, research, clinical and community-oriented facility dedicated to improving the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of mood disorders.
  Website: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- **Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria** has many helpful fact sheets on mental health and mental illness.
  Website: www.mifellowship.org
- **myDr** provides information on health matters, medication and treatments.
  Website: www.mydr.com.au
- **SANE Australia** helps people with mental illness through campaigns, education and research. Includes fact sheets on health and mental illness and resources for young people.
  Website: www.sane.org
- **WA Mental Health** is a one-stop-shop for mental health information in WA.
  Website: www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth

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